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HAWTHORNE

AND

OTHER POEMS.



BOSTON:
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To my Friend,

BENJAMIN HOLT TICKNOR,

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED.

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HAWTHORNE.

READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF THE PHI BETA KAPPA,
HARVARD UNIVERSITY, CAMBRIDGE, JUNE 28, 1877.

HAWTHORNE.



HARP of New England song,
That even in slumber tremblest with the touch
Of poets who like the four winds from thee waken
All harmonies that to thy strings belong, —
Say, wilt thou blame the younger hands too much
Which from thy laurelled resting-place have taken
Thee, crowned-one, in their hold? There is a name
Should quicken thee! No carol Hawthorne sang,
Yet his articulate spirit, like thine own,
Made answer, quick as flame,
To each breath of the shore from which he sprang,
And prose like his was poesy's high tone.

By measureless degrees
Star follows star throughout the rounded night.
Far off his path began, yet reached the near
Sweet influences of the Pleiades, —
A portion and a sharer of the light
That shall so long outlast each burning sphere.
Beneath the shade and whisper of the pines
Two youths were fostered in the Norseland air ;
One found an eagle's plume, and one the wand
Wherewith a seer divines :
Now but the Minstrel lingers of that pair, —
The rod has fallen from the Mage's hand.

Gray on thy mountain height,
More fair than wonderland beside thy streams,
Thou with the splendors twain of youth and age,
This was the son who read thy heart aright,
Of whom thou wast beholden in his dreams, —

The one New-Englander! Upon whose page
Thine offspring still are animate, and move
Adown thy paths, a quaint and stately throng:
Grave men of God who made the olden law,
Fair maidens, meet for love,—
All living types that to the coast belong
Since Carver from the prow thy headlands saw.

What should the master be
Who to the world New-England's self must render,
Her best interpreter, her very own?
How spake the brooding Mother, strong and tender,
Back-looking through her youth betwixt the moan
Of forests and the murmur of the sea?
"Thou too," she said, "must first be set aside
To keep my ancient vigil for a space,—
Taught by repression, by the combating
With thine own pride of pride,

An unknown watcher in a lonely place

With none on whom thine utterance to fling."

But first of all she fed

Her heart's own favorite upon the store

Of precious things she treasures in her woods,
Of charm and story in her valleys spread.

For him her whispering winds and brooks that pour

Made ceaseless music in the solitudes ;
The manifold bright surges of her deep

Gave him their light. Within her voice's call
She lured him on, by roadways overhung

With elms, that he might keep
Remembrance of her legends as they fall

Her shaded walks and gabled roofs among.

Within the mists she drew,
Anon, his silent footsteps, as her own
Were led of old, until he came to be

An eremite, whose life the desert knew,
And gained companionship in dreams alone.

The world, it seemed, had naught for such as he, —
For one who, in his heart's deep wilderness

Shrunk darkling and, whatever wind might blow,
Found no quick use for potent hands and fain,

No chance that might express

To human-kind the thoughts which moved him so.

— O, deem not those long years were quite in
vain! —

For his was the brave soul

Which, touched with fire, dwells not on whatsoever

Its outer senses hold in their intent,

But, sleepless even in sleep, must gather toll

Of dreams which pass like barks upon the river

And make each vision Beauty's instrument ;

That from its own love Love's delight can tell,

And from its own grief guess the shrouded Sorrow ;
From its own joyousness of Joy can sing ;

That can predict so well
From its own dawn the lustre of to-morrow,
The whole flight from the flutter of the wing.

And his the gift which sees
A revelation and a tropic sign
In the lone passion-flower, and can discover
The likeness of the far Antipodes,
Though but a leaf is stranded from the brine ;
His the fine spirit which is so true a lover
Of sovran Art, that all the beck of life
Allure it not until the work be wrought.
Nay, though the shout and smoke of combat rose,
He, through the changeful strife,
Eternal loveliness more closely sought,
And Beauty's changeless law and sure repose.

Was it not well that one —

One, if no more — should meditate aloof,

Though not for naught the time's heroic quarrel,
From what men rush to do and what is done.

He little knew to join the web and woof

Whereof slow Progress weaves her rich apparel,
But toward the Past half longing turned his head.

His deft hand dallied with its common share
Of human toil, nor sought new loads to lift,

But held itself, instead,

All consecrate to uses that make fair,

By right divine of his mysterious gift.

How should the world discern

The artist's self, save through the fine creation

Of his rare moment? How, but from his song,
The unfettered spirit of the minstrel learn?

Yet on this one the stars had set the station

Which to the chief romancer should belong :
Child of the Beautiful ! whose regnant brow
She made her canopy, and from his eyes
Looked outward with a steadfast purple gleam.

Who saw him marvelled how
The soul of that impassioned ray could lie
So calm beyond, — unspoken all its dream.

What sibyl to him bore
The secret oracles that move and haunt?
At night's dread noon he scanned the enchanted glass,
Ay, and himself the warlock's mantle wore,
Nor to the thronging phantoms said Avaunt,
But waved his rod and bade them rise and pass ;
Till thus he drew the lineaments of men
Who fought the old colonial battles three,
Who with the lustihood of Nature warred
And made her docile, — then

Wrestled with Terror and with Tyranny,
Twin wardens of the scaffold and the sword.

He drew his native land,
The few and rude plantations of her Past,
Fringed by the beaches of her sounding shore ;
Her children, as he drew them, there they stand ;
There, too, her Present, with an outline cast
Still from the shape those other centuries wore.
Betimes the orchards and the clover-fields
Change into woods o'ershadowing a host
That winds along the Massachusetts Path ;
The sword of Standish shields
The Plymouth band, and where the lewd ones boast
Stern Endicott pours out his godly wrath.

Within the Province House
The ancient governors hold their broidered state, —

Still gleam the lights, the shadows come and go ;
Here once again the powdered guests carouse,
The masquerade lasts on, the night is late.

Thrice waves a mist-invoking wand, and lo,
What troubled sights ! What summit bald and steep
Where stands a ladder 'gainst the accursed tree?
What dark processions thither slowly climb?

Anon, what lost ones keep
Their midnight tryst with forms that evil be,
Around the witch-fire in the forest grim !

Clearly the master's plan
Revealed his people, even as they were,
The prayerful elder and the winsome maid,
The errant roisterer, the Puritan,
Dark Pyncheon, mournful Hester, — all are there.

But none save he in our own time so laid
His summons on man's spirit ; none but he,

Whether the light thereof were clear or clouded,
Thus on his canvas fixed the human soul,
The thoughts of mystery,
In deep hearts by this mortal guise enshrouded,
Wild hearts that like the church-bells ring and
toll.

Two natures in him strove
Like day with night, his sunshine and his gloom.
To him the stern forefathers' creed descended,
The weight of some inexorable Jove
Prejudging from the cradle to the tomb;
But therewithal the lightsome laughter blended
Of that Arcadian sweetness undismayed
Which finds in Love its law, and graces still
The rood, the penitential symbol worn,—
Which sees, beyond the shade,
The Naiad nymph of every rippling rill,
And hears quick Fancy wind her wilful horn.

What if he brooded long
On Time and Fate,—the ominous progression
Of years that with Man's retributions frown,—
The destinies which round his footsteps throng,—
Justice, that heeds not Mercy's intercession,—
Crime, on its own head calling vengeance down,—
Deaf Chance and blind, that, like the mountain-slide
Puts out Youth's heart of fire and all is dark!
What though the blemish which, in aught of earth,
The maker's hand defied,
Was plain to him,—the one evasive mark
Wherewith Death stamps us for his own at birth!

Ah, none the less we know
He felt the imperceptible fine thrill
With which the waves of being palpitate,
Whether in ecstasy of joy or woe,
And saw the strong divinity of Will
Bringing to halt the stolid tramp of Fate;

Nor from his work was ever absent quite

The presence which, o'ercast it as we may,
Things far beyond our reason can suggest:

There was a drifting light
In Donatello's cell, — a fitful ray
Of sunshine came to hapless Clifford's breast.

Into such blossom brake
Our northern hedge, that neither mortal sadness
Nor the drear thought of lives that strive and fail,
Nor any hues its sombre leaves might take
From clouded skies, could overcome its gladness
Or in the blessing of its shade prevail.
Fresh sprays it yielded them of Merry Mount
For wedding wreaths; blithe Phœbe with the sweet
Pure flowers her promise to her lover gave:

Beside it, from a fount
Where Pearl and Pansie plashed their innocent feet,
A brook ran on and kissed Zenobia's grave.

Silent and dark the spell
Laid on New England by the frozen North ;
Long, long the months,—and yet the Winter ends,
The snow-wraiths vanish, and rejoicing well
The dandelions from the grass leap forth,
And Spring through budding birch and willow sends
Her wind of Paradise. And there are left
Poets to sing of all, and welcome still
The robin's voice, the humble-bee's wise drone ;
Nor are we yet bereft
Of one whose sagas ever at his will
Can answer back the ocean, tone for tone.

But he whose quickened eye
Saw through New England's life her inmost spirit,—
Her heart, and all the stays on which it leant,—
Returns not, since he laid the pencil by
Whose mystic touch none other shall inherit !

What though its work unfinished lies? Half-bent
The rainbow's arch fades out in upper air ;

The shining cataract half-way down the height
Breaks into mist ; the haunting strain, that fell

On listeners unaware,

Ends incomplete, but through the starry night

The ear still waits for what it did not tell.

THE DISCOVERER.



I HAVE a little kinsman
Whose earthly summers are but three,
And yet a voyager is he
Greater than Drake or Frobisher,
Than all their peers together!
He is a brave discoverer,
And, far beyond the tether
Of them who seek the frozen Pole,
Has sailed where the noiseless surges roll.
Ay, he has travelled whither
A winged pilot steered his bark
Through the portals of the dark,

Past hoary Mimir's well and tree,
Across the unknown sea.

Suddenly, in his fair young hour,
Came one who bore a flower,
And laid it in his dimpled hand

With this command :

“Henceforth thou art a rover !
Thou must make a voyage far,
Sail beneath the evening star,
And a wondrous land discover.”

—With his sweet smile innocent

Our little kinsman went.

Since that time no word
From the absent has been heard.

Who can tell

How he fares, or answer well

What the little one has found
Since he left us, outward bound?
Would that he might return!
Then should we learn
From the pricking of his chart
How the skyey roadways part.
Hush! does not the baby this way bring,
To lay beside this severed curl,
Some starry offering
Of chrysolite or pearl?

Ah, no! not so!
We may follow on his track,
But he comes not back.
And yet I dare aver
He is a brave discoverer
Of climes his elders do not know.
He has more learning than appears

On the scroll of twice three thousand years,
More than in the groves is taught,
Or from furthest Indies brought;
He knows, perchance, how spirits fare, —
What shapes the angels wear,
What is their guise and speech
In those lands beyond our reach, —

And his eyes behold

Things that shall never, never be to mortal hearers told.

SISTER BEATRICE.

A LEGEND FROM THE "SERMONES DISCIPULI" OF JEAN
HEROLT, THE DOMINICAN, A. D. 1518.

SISTER BEATRICE.

A CLOISTER tale, — a strange and ancient thing

Long since on vellum writ in gules and or :

And why should Chance to me this trover bring

From the grim dust-heap of forgotten lore,

And not to that gray bard still measuring

His laurelled years by music's golden score,

Nor to some comrade who like him has caught

The charm of lands by me too long unsought?

Why not to one who, with a steadfast eye,

Ingathering her shadow and her sheen,

Saw Venice as she is, and, standing nigh,

Drew from the life that old, dismantled queen?

Or to the poet through whom I well descry
Castile, and the Campeador's demesne?
Or to that eager one whose quest has found
Each place of long renown, the world around;

Whose foot has rested firm on either hill,—
The sea-girt height where glows the midnight sun,
And wild Parnassus; whose melodious skill
Has left no song untried, no wreath unwon?
Why not to these? Yet, since by Fortune's will
This quaint task given me I must not shun,
My verse shall render, fitly as it may,
An old church legend, meet for Christmas Day.

Once on a time (so read the monkish pages),
Within a convent—that doth still abide
Even as it stood in those devouter ages,
Near a fair city, by the highway's side—

There dwelt a sisterhood of them whose wages
Are stored in heaven: each a virgin bride
Of Christ, and bounden meekly to endure
In faith, and works, and chastity most pure.

A convent, and within a summer-land,
Like that of Browning and Boccaccio!
Years since, my greener fancy would have planned
Its station thus: it should have had, I trow,
A square and flattened bell-tower, that might stand
Above deep-windowed buildings long and low,
Closed all securely by a vine-clung wall,
And shadowed on one side by cypress tall;

Within the gate, a garden set with care:
Box-bordered plots, where peach and almond trees
Rained blossoms on the maidens walking there,
Or rustled softly in the summer breeze;

Here were sweet jessamine and jonquil rare,
And arbors meet for pious talk at ease ;
There must have been a dove-cote too, I know,
Where white-winged birds like spirits come and go.

Outside, the thrush and lark their music made
Beyond the olive-grove at dewy morn ;
By noon, cicalas, shrilling in the shade
Of oak and ilex, woke the peasant's horn ;
And, at the time when into darkness fade
The vineyards, from their purple depths were borne
The nightingale's responses to the prayer
Of those sweet saints at vespers, meek and fair.

Such is the place that, with the hand and eye
Which are the joy of youth, I should have painted.
Say not, who look thereon, that 't is awry —
Like nothing real, by rhymesters' use attained.

Ah well! then put the faulty picture by,

And help me draw an abbess long since sainted.

Think of your love, each one, and thereby guess

The fashion of this lady's beauteousness.

For in this convent Sister Beatrice,

Of all her nuns the fairest and most young,

Became, through grace and special holiness,

Their sacred head, and moved, her brood among,

Dévoté d'âme et très-fervente au service;

And thrice each day, their hymns and Aves sung,

At Mary's altar would before them kneel,

Keeping her vows with chaste and pious zeal.

Now in the Holy Church there was a clerk,

A godly-seeming man (as such there be

Whose selfish hearts with craft and guile are dark),

Young, gentle-phrased, of handsome mien and free.

His passion chose this maiden for its mark,
Begrudging heaven her white chastity,
And with most sacrilegious art the while
He sought her trustful nature to beguile.

Oft as they met, with subtle hardihood
He still more archly played the traitor's part,
And strove to wake that murmur in her blood
That times the pulses of a woman's heart ;
And in her innocence she long withstood
The secret empter, but at last his art
Changed all her tranquil thoughts to love's desire,
Her vestal flame to earth's unhallowed fire.

So the fair governess, o'ermastered, gave
Herself to the destroyer, yet as one
That slays, in pity, her sweet self, to save
Another from some wretched deed undone ;

But when she found her heart was folly's slave,
She sought the altar which her steps must shun
Thenceforth, and yielded up her sacred trust,
Ere tasting that false fruit which turns to dust.

One eve the nuns beheld her entering
Alone, as if for prayer beneath the rood,
Their chapel-shrine, wherein the offering
And masterpiece of some great painter stood, —
The Virgin Mother, without plume or wing
Ascending, poised in rapt beatitude,
With hands crosswise, and intercession mild
For all who crave her mercy undefiled.

There Beatrice — poor, guilty, desperate maid —
Took from her belt the convent's blessed keys,
And with them on the altar humbly laid
Her missal, uttering such words as these

(Her eyes cast down, and all her soul afraid):

“O dearest mistress, hear me on my knees
Confess to thee, in helplessness and shame,
I am no longer fit to speak thy name.

“Take back the keys wherewith in constancy
Thy house and altar I have guarded well!
No more may Beatrice thy servant be,

For earthly love her steps must needs compel.
Forget me in this sore infirmity

When my successor here her beads shall tell.”
This said, the girl withdrew her as she might,
And with her lover fled that selfsame night;

Fled out, and into the relentless world

Where Love abides, but Love that breedeth Sorrow,
Where Purity still weeps with pinions furled,
And Passion lies in wait her all to borrow.

From such a height to such abasement whirled

She fled that night, and many a day and morrow
Abode indeed with him for whose embrace
She bartered heaven and her hope of grace.

O fickle will and pitiless desire,

Twin wolves, that raven in a lustful heart
And spare not innocence, nor yield, nor tire,
But youth from joy and life from goodness part;
That drag an unstained victim to the mire,
Then cast it soiled and hopeless on the mart!
Even so the clerk, once having dulled his longing,
A worse thing did than that first bitter wronging.

The base hind left her, ruined and alone,

Unknowing by what craft to gain her bread
In the hard world that gives to Want a stone.
What marvel that she drifted whither led

The current, that with none to heed her moan

She reached the shore where life on husks is fed,
Sank down, and, in the strangeness of her fall,
Among her fellows was the worst of all!

Thus stranded, her fair body, consecrate

To holiness, was smutched by spoilers rude,
And entered all the seven fiends where late
Abode a seeming angel, pure and good.

What paths she followed in such woful state,
By want, remorse, and the world's hate pursued,
Were known alone to them whose spacious ken
O'erlooks not even the poor Magdalen.

After black years their dismal change had wrought

Upon her beauty, and there was no stay
By which to hold, some chance or yearning brought
Her vagrant feet along the convent-way ;

And half as in a dream there came a thought
 (For years she had not dared to think or pray)
That moved her there to bow her in the dust
And bear no more, but perish as she must.

Crouched by the gate she waited, it is told,
 Brooding the past and all of life forlorn,
Nor dared to lift her pallid face and old
 Against the passer's pity or his scorn ;
And there perchance had ere another morn
 Died of her shame and sorrows manifold,
But that a portress bade her pass within
For solace of her wretchedness or sin.

To whom the lost one, drinking now her fill
 Of woe that wakened memories made more drear,
Said, " Was there not one Beatrice, until
 Some time now gone, that was an abbess here?"

“That was?” the other said. “Is she not still

The convent’s head, and still our mistress dear?
Look! even now she comes with open hand,
The purest, saintliest lady in the land!”

And Beatrice, uplifting then her eyes,

Saw her own self (in womanhood divine,
It seemed) draw nigh, with holy look and wise,
The aged portress leaving at a sign.
Even while she marvelled at that strange disguise,
There stood before her, radiant, benign,
The blessed Mother of Mercy, all aflame
With light, as if from Paradise she came!

From her most sacred lips, upon the ears

Of Beatrice, these words of wonder fell:
“Daughter, thy sins are pardoned; dry thy tears,
And in this house again my mercies tell,

For, in thy stead, myself these woful years

Have governed here and borne thine office well.

Take back the keys : save thee and me alone

No one thy fall and penance yet hath known ! ”

Even then, as faded out that loveliness,

The abbess, looking down, herself descried

Clean-robed and spotless, such as all confess

To be a saint and fit for Heaven’s bride.

So ends the legend, and ye well may guess

(Who, being untempted, walk in thoughtless pride)

God of his grace can make the sinful pure,

And while earth lasts shall mercy still endure.

SEEKING THE MAY-FLOWER.

THE sweetest sound our whole year round —

'T is the first robin of the spring !

The song of the full orchard choir

Is not so fine a thing.

Glad sights are common : Nature draws

Her random pictures through the year,

But oft her music bids us long

Remember those most dear.

To me, when in the sudden spring

I hear the earliest robin's lay,

With the first trill there comes again

One picture of the May.

The veil is parted wide, and lo,
A moment, though my eyelids close,
Once more I see that wooded hill
Where the arbutus grows.

I see the village dryad kneel,
Trailing her slender fingers through
The knotted tendrils, as she lifts
Their pink, pale flowers to view.

Once more I dare to stoop beside
The dove-eyed beauty of my choice,
And long to touch her careless hair,
And think how dear her voice.

My eager, wandering hands assist
With fragrant blooms her lap to fill,
And half by chance they meet her own,
Half by our young hearts' will.

Till, at the last, those blossoms won, —
Like her, so pure, so sweet, so shy, —
Upon the gray and lichened rocks
Close at her feet I lie.

Fresh blows the breeze through hemlock-trees,
The fields are edged with green below ;
And naught but youth and hope and love
We know or care to know !

Hark ! from the moss-clung apple-bough,
Beyond the tumbled wall, there broke
That gurgling music of the May, —
'T was the first robin spoke !

I heard it, ay, and heard it not, —
For little then my glad heart wist
What toil and time should come to pass,
And what delight be missed ;

Nor thought thereafter, year by year

Hearing that fresh yet olden song,

To yearn for unreturning joys

That with its joy belong.

NEWS FROM OLYMPIA.*

OLYMPIA? Yes, strange tidings from the city
Which pious mortals builded, stone by stone,
For those old gods of Hellas, half in pity
Of their storm-mantled height and dwelling lone,—
Their seat upon the mountain overhanging
Where Zeus withdrew behind the rolling cloud,
Where crowned Apollo sang, the phorminx twanging,
And at Poseidon's word the forests bowed.

Ay, but that fated day
When from the plain Olympia passed away;

* "One after the other the figures described by Pausanias are dragged from the earth. Niké has been found; the head of Kladeos is there; Myrtilos is announced, and Zeus will soon emerge. This is earnest of what may follow." — *Despatch to the London Times*.

When ceased the oracles, and long unwept
Amid their fanes the gods deserted fell,
While sacerdotal ages, as they slept,
The ruin covered well !

The pale Jew flung his cross, thus one has written,
Among them as they sat at the high feast,
And saw the gods, before that token smitten,
Fade slowly, while His presence still increased,
Until the seas Ionian and Ægæan
Gave out a cry that Pan himself was dead,
And all was still : thenceforth no more the pæan,
No more by men the prayer to Zeus was said.

Sank, like a falling star,
Hephaistos in the Lemnian waters far ;
The silvery Huntress fled the darkened sky ;
Dim grew Athene's helm, Apollo's crown ;

Alpheios' nymphs stood wan and trembling by

When Hera's fane went down.

News! what news? Has it in truth then ended,

The term appointed for that wondrous sleep?

Has Earth so well her fairest brood defended

Within her bosom? Was their slumber deep

Not this our dreamless rest that knows no waking,

But that to which the years are as a day?

What! are they coming back, their prison breaking, —

These gods of Homer's chant, of Pindar's lay?

Are they coming back in might,

Olympia's gods, to claim their ancient right?

Shall then the sacred majesty of old,

The grace that holy was, the noble rage,

Temper our strife, abate our greed for gold,

Make fine the modern age?

Yes, they are coming back, to light returning !

Bold are the hearts and void of fear the hands
That toil, the lords of War and Spoil unurning,
Or of their sisters fair that break the bands ;
That loose the sovran mistress of desire,
Queen Aphrodite, to possess the earth
Once more ; that dare renew dread Hera's ire,
And rouse old Pan to wantonness of mirth.

The herald Niké, first,
From the dim resting-place unfettered burst,
Winged victor over fate and time and death !
Zeus follows next, and all his children then ;
Phoibos awakes and draws a joyous breath,
And Love returns to men.

Ah, let them come, the glorious Immortals,
Rulers no more, but with mankind to dwell,

The dear companions of our hearts and portals,
Voiceless, unworshipped, yet beloved right well !
Pallas shall sit enthroned in wisdom's station,
Eros and Psyche be forever wed,
And still the primal loveliest creation
Yield new delight from ancient beauty bred.

Triumphant as of old,
Changeless while Art and Song their warrant hold,
The visions of our childhood haunt us still,
Still Hellas sways us with her charm supreme.
The morn is past, but Man has not the will
To banish yet the dream.

THE MONUMENT OF GREELEY.

READ AT THE UNVEILING OF THE BUST SURMOUNTING
THE PRINTERS' MONUMENT TO HORACE GREELEY,
GREENWOOD CEMETERY, DECEMBER 4, 1876.

THE MONUMENT OF GREELEY.

ONCE more, dear mother Earth, we stand
In reverence where thy bounty gave
Our brother, yielded to thy hand,
The sweet protection of the grave !
Well hast thou soothed him through the years,
The years our love and sorrow number, —
And with thy smiles, and with thy tears,
Made green and fair his place of slumber.

Thine be the keeping of that trust ;
And ours this image, born of Art
To shine above his hidden dust,
What time the sunrise breezes part

The trees, and with new light enwreathe
Yon head, — until the lips are golden,
And from them music seems to breathe
As from the desert statue olden.

Would it were so! that now we might
Hear once his uttered voice again,
Or hold him present to our sight,
Nor reach with empty hands and vain!
O that, from some far place, were heard
One cadence of his speech returning, —
A whispered tone, a single word,
Sent back in answer to our yearning!

It may not be? What then the spark,
The essence which illumed the whole
And made his living form its mark
And outward likeness? What the soul

That warmed the heart and poised the head,
And spoke the thoughts we now inherit?
Bright force of fire and ether bred,—
Where art thou now, elusive Spirit?

Where, now, the sunburst of a love
Which blended still with sudden wrath
To nerve the righteous hand that strove,
And blaze in the oppressor's path?
Fair Earth, our dust is thine indeed!

Too soon he reached the voiceless portal,—
That whither leads? Where lies the mead
He gained, and knew himself immortal?

Or, tell us, on what distant star,
Where even as here are toil and wrong,
With strength renewed he lifts afar
A voice of aid, a war-cry strong?

What fruit, this stern Olympiad past,
Has that rich nature elsewhere yielded,
What conquest gained and knowledge vast,
What kindred beings loved and shielded!

Why seek to know? he little sought,
Himself, to lift the close-drawn veil,
Nor for his own salvation wrought
And pleaded, ay, and wore his mail;
No selfish grasp of life, no fear,
Won for mankind his ceaseless caring,
But for themselves he held them dear, —
Their birth and shrouded exit sharing.

Not his the feverish will to live
A sunnier life, a longer space,
Save that the Eternal Law might give
The boon in common to his race.

Earth, 't was thy heaven he loved, and best
Thy precious offspring, man and woman,
And labor for them seemed but rest
To him, whose nature was so human.

Even here his spirit haply longed
To stay, remembered by our kind,
And where the haunts of men are thronged
Move yet among them. Seek and find
A presence, though his voice has ceased,
Still, even where we dwell, remaining,
With all its tenderest thrills increased
And all it cared to ask obtaining.

List, how the varied things that took
The impress of his passion rare
Make answer! To the roadways look,
The watered vales, the hamlets fair.

He walks unseen the living woods,
The fields, the town, the shaded borough,
And in the pastoral solitudes
Delights to view the lengthening furrow.

The faithful East that cradled him,
Still, while she deems her nursling sleeps,
Sits by his couch with vision dim ;
The plenteous West his feast-day keeps ;
The wistful South recalls the ways
Of one who in his love enwound her,
And stayed her, in the evil days,
With arms of comfort thrown around her.

He lives wherever men to men
In perilous hours his words repeat,
Where clangs the forge, where glides the pen,
Where toil and traffic crowd the street ;

And in whatever time or place

Earth's purest souls their purpose strengthen,
Down the broad pathway of his race

The shadow of his name shall lengthen.

"Still with us!" all the liegemen cry

Who read his heart and held him dear;
The hills declare "He shall not die!"

The prairies answer "He is here!"
Immortal thus, no dread of fate

Be ours, no vain *memento mori*:
Life, Life, not Death, we celebrate, —
A lasting presence touched with glory.

The star may vanish, — but a ray,
Sent forth, what mandate can recall?
The circling wave still keeps its way
That marked a turret's seaward fall;

The least of music's uttered strains
Is part of Nature's voice forever ;
And aye beyond the grave remains
The great, the good man's high endeavor !

Well may the brooding Earth retake
The form we knew, to be a part
Of bloom and herbage, fern and brake,
New lives that from her being start.
Naught of the soul shall there remain :
They came on void and darkness solely
Who the veiled Spirit sought in vain
Within the temple's shrine Most Holy.

That, that, has found again the source
From which itself to us was lent :
The Power that, in perpetual course,
Makes of the dust an instrument

Supreme ; the universal Soul ;
The current infinite and single
Wherein, as ages onward roll,
Life, Thought, and Will forever mingle.

What more is left, to keep *our* hold
On him who was so true and strong ?
This semblance, raised above the mould
With offerings of word and song,
That men may teach, in aftertime,
Their sons how goodness marked the features
Of one whose life was made sublime
By service for his brother creatures.

And last, and lordliest, his fame, —
A station in the sacred line
Of heroes that have left a name
We conjure with, — a place divine,

Since, in the world's eternal plan,
Divinity itself is given,
To him who lives or dies for Man
And looks within his soul for Heaven.

KEARNY AT SEVEN PINES.

SO that soldierly legend is still on its journey, —

That story of Kearny who knew not to yield !

'T was the day when with Jameson, fierce Berry, and
Birney,

Against twenty thousand he rallied the field.

Where the red volleys poured, where the clamor rose
highest,

Where the dead lay in clumps through the dwarf oak
and pine,

Where the aim from the thicket was surest and nighest, —
No charge like Phil Kearny's along the whole line.

When the battle went ill, and the bravest were solemn,
Near the dark Seven Pines, where we still held our
ground,

He rode down the length of the withering column,

And his heart at our war-cry leapt up with a bound ;

He snuffed, like his charger, the wind of the powder, —

His sword waved us on and we answered the sign :

Loud our cheer as we rushed, but his laugh rang the
louder,

“There ’s the devil’s own fun, boys, along the whole
line !”

How he strode his brown steed ! How we saw his blade
brighten

In the one hand still left, — and the reins in his teeth !

He laughed like a boy when the holidays heighten,

But a soldier’s glance shot from his visor beneath.

Up came the reserves to the mellay infernal,

Asking where to go in, — through the clearing or pine ?

“O, anywhere ! Forward ! ’T is all the same, Colonel :

You ’ll find lovely fighting along the whole line !”

O, evil the black shroud of night at Chantilly,
That hid him from sight of his brave men and tried!
Foul, foul sped the bullet that clipped the white lily,
The flower of our knighthood, the whole army's pride!
Yet we dream that he still,—in that shadowy region
Where the dead form their ranks at the wan drummer's
sign,—
Rides on, as of old, down the length of his legion,
And the word still is Forward! along the whole line.

CUSTER.

WHAT! shall that sudden blade

Leap out no more?

No more thy hand be laid

Upon the sword-hilt, smiting sore?

O for another such

The charger's rein to clutch,—

One equal voice to summon victory,

Sounding thy battle-cry,

Brave darling of the soldiers' choice!

Would there were one more voice!

O gallant charge, too bold!

O fierce, imperious greed

To pierce the clouds that in their darkness hold

Slaughter of man and steed !

Now, stark and cold,
Among thy fallen braves thou liest,
And even with thy blood defiest

The wolfish foe :

But ah, thou liest low,
And all our birthday song is hushed indeed !

Young lion of the plain,

Thou of the tawny mane !

Hotly the soldiers' hearts shall beat,

Their mouths thy death repeat,

Their vengeance seek the trail again

Where thy red doomsmen be ;

But on the charge no more shall stream

Thy hair, — no more thy sabre gleam, —

No more ring out thy battle-shout,

Thy cry of victory !

Not when a hero falls
The sound a world appalls:
For while we plant his cross
There is a glory, even in the loss:
But when some craven heart
From honor dares to part,
Then, then, the groan, the blanching cheek,
And men in whispers speak,
Nor kith nor country dare reclaim
From the black depths his name.

Thou, wild young warrior, rest,
By all the prairie winds caressed!
Swift was thy dying pang;
Even as the war-cry rang
Thy deathless spirit mounted high
And sought Columbia's sky:—

There, to the northward far,
Shines a new star,
And from it blazes down
The light of thy renown !

July 10, 1876.

THE COMEDIAN'S LAST NIGHT.

NOT yet! No, no, — you would not quote

That meanest of the critic's gags?

'T was surely not of me they wrote

Those words, *too late the veteran lags*:

'T is not so very late with me;

I 'm not so old as that, you know,

Though work and trouble — as you see —

(Not years) have brought me somewhat low.

I failed, you say? No, no, not yet!

Or, if I did, — with such a past,

Where is the man would have me quit

Without one triumph at the last?

But one night more, — a little thing

To you, — I swear 't is all I ask!

Once more to make the wide house ring, —
To tread the boards, to wear the mask,
To move the coldest as of yore,
To make them laugh, to make them cry,
To be — to be myself once more,
And then, if must be, let me die!
The prompter's bell! I 'm here, you see:
By Heaven, friends, you 'll break my heart!
Nat Gosling's called: let be, let be, —
None but myself shall act the part!

Yes, thank you, boy, I 'll take your chair
One moment, while I catch my breath.
D' ye hear the noise they 're making there?
'T would warm a player's heart in death.
How say you now? Whate'er they write,
We 've put that bitter gibe to shame;
I knew, I knew there burned to-night
Within my soul the olden flame!

Stand off a bit : that final round, —

I 'd hear it ere it dies away

The last, last time ! — there 's no more sound :

So end the player and the play.

The house is cleared. My senses swim ;

I shall be better, though, anon, —

One stumbles when the lights are dim, —

'T is growing late : we must be gone.

Well, braver luck than mine, old friends !

A little work and fame are ours

While Heaven health and fortune lends,

And then — the coffin and the flowers !

These scattered garments ? let them lie :

Some fresher actor (I' m not vain)

Will dress anew the part ; — but I —

I shall not put them on again.

ALL IN A LIFETIME.

THOU shalt have sun and shower from heaven above,
Thou shalt have flower and thorn from earth below,
Thine shall be foe to hate and friend to love,
Pleasures that others gain, the ills they know,—
And all in a lifetime.

Hast thou a golden day, a starlit night,
Mirth, and music, and love without alloy?
Leave no drop undrunken of thy delight:
Sorrow and shadow follow on thy joy.
'T is all in a lifetime.

What if the battle end and thou hast lost?

Others have lost the battles thou hast won ;
Haste thee, bind thy wounds, nor count the cost :
Over the field will rise to-morrow's sun.

'T is all in a lifetime.

Laugh at the braggart sneer, the open scorn, —

'Ware of the secret stab, the slanderous lie :
For seventy years of turmoil thou wast born,
Bitter and sweet are thine till these go by.

'T is all in a lifetime.

Reckon thy voyage well, and spread the sail, —

Wind and calm and current shall warp thy way ;
Compass shall set thee false, and chart shall fail ;
Ever the waves will use thee for their play.

'T is all in a lifetime.

Thousands of years ago were chance and change,

Thousands of ages hence the same shall be ;

Naught of thy joy and grief is new or strange :

Gather apace the good that falls to thee !

'T is all in a lifetime !

THE SKULL IN THE GOLD DRIFT.

WHAT ho ! dumb jester, cease to grin and mask it !

Grim courier, thou hast stayed upon the road !

Yield up the secret of this battered casket,

This shard, where once a living soul abode !

What dost thou here ? how long hast lain imbedded

In crystal sands, the drift of Time's despair ;

Thine earth to earth with aureate dower wedded,

Thy parts all changed to something rich and rare ?

Voiceless thou art, and yet a revelation

Of that most ancient world beneath the new ;

But who shall guess thy race, thy name and station,

Æons and æons ere these boulders grew ?

What alchemy can make thy visage liker

Its untransmuted shape, thy flesh restore,

Resolve to blood again thy golden ichor,

Possess thee of the life thou hadst before?

Before! And when? What ages immemorial

Have passed since daylight fell where thou dost sleep!

What molten strata, ay, and flotsam boreal,

Have shielded well thy rest, and pressed thee deep!

Thou little wist what mighty floods descended,

How sprawled the armored monsters in their camp,

Nor heardest, when the watery cycle ended,

The mastodon and mammoth o'er thee tramp.

How seemed this globe of ours when thou didst scan it?

When, in its lusty youth, there sprang to birth

All that hath life, unnurtured, and the planet

Was paradise, the true Saturnian Earth!

Far toward the poles was stretched the happy garden ;
Earth kept it fair by warmth from her own breast ;
Toil had not come to dwarf her sons and harden ;
No crime (there was no want) perturbed their rest.

How lived thy kind ? Was there no duty blended
With all their toilless joy, — no grand desire ?
Perchance as shepherds on the meads they tended
Their flocks, and knew the pastoral pipe and lyre ;
Until a hundred happy generations,
Whose birth and death had neither pain nor fear,
At last, in riper ages, brought the nations
To modes which we renew who greet thee here.

How stately then they built their royal cities,
With what strong engines speeded to and fro ;
What music thrilled their souls ; what poets' ditties
Made youth with love, and age with honor glow !

And had they then their Homer, Kepler, Bacon?

Did some Columbus find an unknown clime?

Was there an archetypal Christ, forsaken

Of those he died to save, in that far time?

When came the end? What terrible convulsion

Heaved from within the Earth's distended shell?

What pent-up demons, by their fierce repulsion,

Made of that sunlit crust a sunless hell?

How, when the hour was ripe, those deathful forces

In one resistless doom o'erwhelmed ye all;

Ingulfed the seas and dried the river courses,

And made the forests and the cities fall!

Ah me! with what a sudden, dreadful thunder

The whole round world was split from pole to pole!

Down sank the continents, the waters under,

And fire burst forth where now the oceans roll;

Of those wan flames the dismal exhalations
 Stifled, anon, each living creature's breath,
Dear life was driven from its utmost stations,
 And seethed beneath the smoking pall of death?

Then brawling leapt full height yon helméd giants;
 The proud Sierras on the skies laid hold;
Their watch and ward have bidden time defiance,
 Guarding thy grave amid the sands of gold.
Thy kind was then no more! What untold ages,
 Ere Man, renewed from earth by slow degrees,
Woke to the strife he now with Nature wages
 O'er ruder lands and more tempestuous seas.

How poor the gold, that made thy burial splendid,
 Beside one single annal of thy race,
One implement, one fragment that attended
 Thy life — which now hath left not even a trace!

From the soul's realm awhile recall thy spirit,

See how the land is spread, how flows the main,

The tribes that in thy stead the globe inherit,

Their grand unrest, their eager joy and pain.

Beneath our feet a thousand ages moulder,

Grayer our skies than thine, the winds more chill ;

Thine the young world, and ours the hoarier, colder,

But Man's unfaltering heart is dauntless still.

And yet — and yet like thine his solemn story ;

Grope where he will, transition lies before ;

We, too, must pass ! our wisdom, works, and glory

In turn shall yield, and change, and be no more.

SONG FROM A DRAMA.

I KNOW not if moonlight or starlight
Be soft on the land and the sea, —
I catch but the near light, the far light,
Of eyes that are burning for me ;
The scent of the night, of the roses,
May burden the air for thee, Sweet, —
'T is only the breath of thy sighing
I know, as I lie at thy feet.

The winds may be sobbing or singing,
Their touch may be fervent or cold,
The night-bells may toll or be ringing, —
I care not, while thee I enfold !

The feast may go on, and the music
Be scattered in ecstasy round,—
Thy whisper, “I love thee! I love thee!”
Hath flooded my soul with its sound.

I think not of time that is flying,
How short is the hour I have won,
How near is this living to dying,
How the shadow still follows the sun;
There is naught upon earth, no desire,
Worth a thought, though 't were had by a sign!
I love thee! I love thee! bring nigher
Thy spirit, thy kisses, to mine!

THE SUN-DIAL.

"Horas non numero nisi serenas."

ONLY the sunny hours

Are numbered here, —

No winter-time that lowers,

No twilight drear.

But from a golden sky

When sunbeams fall,

Though the bright moments fly, —

They 're counted all.

My heart its transient woe

Remembers not !

The ills of long ago

Are half forgot ;

But Childhood's round of bliss,
Youth's tender thrill,
Hope's whisper, Love's first kiss, —
They haunt me still !

Sorrows are everywhere,
Joys — all too few !
Have we not had our share
Of pleasure too ?
No Past the glad heart cowers,
No memories dark ;
Only the sunny hours
The dial mark.

MADRIGAL.

DORUS TO LYCORIS, WHO REPROVED HIM FOR INCONSTANCY.

WHY should I constant be?

The bird in yonder tree,

 This leafy summer,

Hath not his last year's mate,

Nor dreads to venture fate

 With a new-comer.

Why should I fear to sip

The sweets of each red lip?

 In every bower

The roving bee may taste

(Lest aught should run to waste)

 Each fresh-blown flower.

The trickling rain doth fall
Upon us one and all;
The south-wind kisses
The saucy milkmaid's cheek,
The nun's, demure and meek,
Nor any misses.

Then ask no more of me
That I should constant be,
Nor eke desire it;
Take not such idle pains
To hold our love in chains,
Nor coax, nor hire it.

Be all things in thyself, —
A sprite, a tricksy elf,
Forever changing,
So that thy latest mood

May ever bring new food
To Fancy ranging.

Forget what thou wast first,
And as I loved thee erst
In soul and feature,
I 'll love thee out of mind
When each new morn shall find
Thee a new creature.

CLARA MORRIS.

TOUCHED by the fervor of her art,

No flaws to-night discover !

Her judge shall be the people's heart,

This Western world her lover.

The secret given to her alone

No frigid schoolman taught her :—

Once more returning, dearer grown,

We greet thee, Passion's daughter !

WITH A SPRIG OF HEATHER.

TO THE LADY WHO SENT ME A JAR OF HYMETTIAN HONEY.

LADY, had the lot been mine
That befell the sage divine,
Near Hymettus to be bred,
And in sleep on honey fed,
I would send to you, be sure,
Rhythmic verses — tuneful, pure,
Such as flowed when Greece was young,
And the Attic songs were sung ;
I would take your little jar,
Filled with sweetness from afar, —
Brown as amber, bright as gold,
Breathing odors manifold, —
And would thank you, sip by sip,

With the classic honeyed lip.
But the gods did not befriend
Me in childhood's sleep, nor send,
One by one, their laden bees,
That I now might sing at ease
With the winsome voice and word
In this age too seldom heard.
(Had they the Atlantic crost,
Half their treasure had been lost !)
Changed the time, and gone the art
Of the glad Athenian heart.
Take you, then, in turn, I pray,
For your gift, this little spray,—
Heather from a breezy hill
That of Burns doth whisper still.
On the soil where this was bred
The rapt ploughman laid his head,
Sang, and looking to the sky

Saw the Muses hovering nigh.

From the air and from the gorse

Scotland's sweetness took its source ;—

Precious still your jar, you see,

Though its honey stays with me.

THE LORD'S-DAY GALE.

BAY ST. LAWRENCE, AUGUST, 1873.

THE LORD'S-DAY GALE.



IN Gloucester port lie fishing craft, —

More stanch and trim were never seen :

They are sharp before and sheer abaft,

And true their lines the masts between.

Along the wharves of Gloucester Town

Their fares are lightly handed down,

And the laden flakes to sunward lean.

Well know the men each cruising-ground,

And where the cod and mackerel be ;

Old Eastern Point the schooners round

And leave Cape Ann on the larboard lee :

Sound are the planks, the hearts are bold,

That brave December's surges cold

On Georges' shoals in the outer sea.

And some must sail to the banks far north

And set their trawls for the hungry cod,—

In the ghostly fog creep back and forth

By shrouded paths no foot hath trod ;

Upon the crews the ice-winds blow,

The bitter sleet, the frozen snow,—

Their lives are in the hand of God !

New England ! New England !

Needs sail they must, so brave and poor,

Or June be warm or Winter storm,

Lest a wolf gnaw through the cottage-door !

Three weeks at home, three long months gone,

While the patient goodwives sleep alone,

And wake to hear the breakers roar.

The Grand Bank gathers in its dead, —

The deep sea-sand is their winding-sheet;

Who does not Georges' billows dread

That dash together the drifting fleet?

Who does not long to hear, in May,

The pleasant wash of Saint Lawrence Bay,

The fairest ground where fishermen meet?

There the west wave holds the red sunlight

Till the bells at home are rung for nine:

Short, short the watch, and calm the night;

The fiery northern streamers shine;

The eastern sky anon is gold,

And winds from piny forests old

Scatter the white mists off the brine.

The Province craft with ours at morn

Are mingled when the vapors shift;

All day, by breeze and current borne,
Across the bay the sailors drift;
With toll and seine its wealth they win,—
The dappled, silvery spoil come in
Fast as their hands can haul and lift.

New England! New England!
Thou lovest well thine ocean main!
It spreadeth its locks among thy rocks,
And long against thy heart hath lain;
Thy ships upon its bosom ride
And feel the heaving of its tide;
To thee its secret speech is plain.

Cape Breton and Edward Isle between,
In strait and gulf the schooners lay;
The sea was all at peace, I ween,
The night before that August day;

Was never a Gloucester skipper there,
But thought erelong, with a right good fare,
To sail for home from Saint Lawrence Bay.

New England! New England!

Thy giant's love was turned to hate!
The winds control his fickle soul,
And in his wrath he hath no mate.
Thy shores his angry scourges tear,
And for thy children in his care
The sudden tempests lie in wait.

The East Wind gathered all unknown,—
A thick sea-cloud his course before;
He left by night the frozen zone
And smote the cliffs of Labrador;
He lashed the coasts on either hand,
And betwixt the Cape and Newfoundland
Into the Bay his armies pour.

He caught our helpless cruisers there
As a gray wolf harries the huddling fold ;
A sleet — a darkness — filled the air,
A shuddering wave before it rolled :
That Lord's-Day morn it was a breeze, —
At noon, a blast that shook the seas, —
At night — a wind of Death took hold !

It leapt across the Breton bar,
A death-wind from the stormy East !
It scarred the land, and whirled afar
The sheltering thatch of man and beast ;
It mingled rick and roof and tree,
And like a besom swept the sea,
And churned the waters into yeast.

From Saint Paul's light to Edward Isle
A thousand craft it smote amain ;

And some against it strove the while,
And more to make a port were fain :
The mackerel-gulls flew screaming past,
And the stick that bent to the noonday blast
Was split by the sundown hurricane.

Woe, woe to those whom the islands pen !
In vain they shun the double capes :
Cruel are the reefs of Magdalen ;
The Wolf's white fang what prey escapes ?
The Grin'stone grinds the bones of some,
And Coffin Isle is craped with foam ;—
On Deadman's shore are fearful shapes !

O, what can live on the open sea,
Or moored in port the gale outride ?
The very craft that at anchor be
Are dragged along by the swollen tide !

The great storm-wave came rolling west,
And tossed the vessels on its crest:

The ancient bounds its might defied!

The ebb to check it had no power;

The surf ran up an untold height;

It rose, nor yielded, hour by hour,

A night and day, a day and night;

Far up the seething shores it cast

The wrecks of hull and spar and mast,

The strangled crews,—a woeful sight!

There were twenty and more of Breton sail

Fast anchored on one mooring-ground;

Each lay within his neighbor's hail,

When the thick of the tempest closed them round:

All sank at once in the gaping sea,—

Somewhere on the shoals their corpses be,

The foundered hulks, and the seamen drowned.

On reef and bar our schooners drove
Before the wind, before the swell ;
By the steep sand-cliffs their ribs were stove, —
Long, long, their crews the tale shall tell !
Of the Gloucester fleet are wrecks threescore ;
Of the Province sail two hundred more
Were stranded in that tempest fell.

The bedtime bells in Gloucester Town
That Sabbath night rang soft and clear ;
The sailors' children laid them down, —
Dear Lord ! their sweet prayers couldst thou hear ?
'T is said that gently blew the winds ;
The goodwives, through the seaward blinds,
Looked down the bay and had no fear.

New England ! New England !

Thy ports their dauntless seamen mourn ;

The twin capes yearn for their return

Who never shall be thither borne ;

Their orphans whisper as they meet ;

The homes are dark in many a street,

And women move in weeds forlorn.

And wilt thou quail, and dost thou fear ?

Ah, no ! though widows' cheeks are pale,

The lads shall say : " Another year,

And we shall be of age to sail ! "

And the mothers' hearts shall fill with pride,

Though tears drop fast for them who died

When the fleet was wrecked in the Lord's-Day gale.

TRANSLATIONS.



THE DEATH OF AGAMEMNON.

I.

H O M E R.

I.

THE DEATH OF AGAMEMNON.

FROM HOMER.

[*Odyssey*, XI., 385 - 456.]

ODYSSEUS IN HADES.

AFTERWARD, soon as the chaste Persephone hither
and thither 385

Now had scattered afar the slender shades of the
women,

Came the sorrowing ghost of Agamemnon Atreides ;
Round whom thronged, besides, the souls of the others
who also

Died, and met their fate, with him in the house of
Aigisthos.

He, then, after he drank of the dark blood, instantly
knew me, — 390

Ay, and he wailed aloud, and plenteous tears was
shedding,

Toward me reaching hands and eagerly longing to
touch me ;

But he was shorn of strength, nor longer came at his
bidding

That great force which once abode in his pliant mem-
bers.

Seeing him thus, I wept, and my heart was laden with
pity,

395

And, uplifting my voice, in wingéd words I addressed
him :

“King of men, Agamemnon, thou glorious son of
Atreus,

Say, in what wise did the doom of prostrate death over-
come thee?

Was it within thy ships thou wast subdued by Poseidon
Rousing the dreadful blast of winds too hard to be
mastered,

400

Or on the firm-set land did banded foemen destroy
thee

Cutting their oxen off, and their flocks so fair, or, it
may be,

While in a town's defence, or in that of women, con-
tending?"

Thus I spake, and he, replying, said to me straight-
way:

"Nobly-born and wise Odysseus, son of Laertes, 405

Neither within my ships was I subdued by Poseidon
Rousing the dreadful blast of winds too hard to be
mastered,

Nor on the firm-set land did banded foemen destroy
me,—

Nay, but death and my doom were well contrived by
Aigisthos,

Who, with my curséd wife, at his own house bidding
me welcome, 410

Fed me, and slew me, as one might slay an ox at the
manger !

So, by a death most wretched, I died ; and all my
companions

Round me were slain off-hand, like white-toothed swine
that are slaughtered

Thus, when some lordly man, abounding in power and
riches,

Orders a wedding-feast, or a frolic, or mighty carousal.⁴¹⁵
Thou indeed hast witnessed the slaughter of number-
less heroes

Massacred, one by one, in the battle's heat ; but with
pity

All thy heart had been full, if thou hadst seen what
I tell thee, —

How in the hall we lay among the wine-jars, and
under

Tables laden with food ; and how the pavement, on all
sides

Swam with blood ! And I heard the dolorous cry of

Kassandra,

Priam's daughter, whom treacherous Klytaimnestra

aneared me

Slew ; and upon the ground I fell in my death-throes,

vainly

Reaching out hands to my sword, while the shameless

woman departed,

Nor did she even stay to press her hands on my eye-

lids,

425

No, nor to close my mouth, although I was passing

to Hades.

O, there is naught more dire, more insolent than a

woman

After the very thought of deeds like these has pos-

sessed her, —

One who would dare to devise an act so utterly shame-

less,

Lying in wait to slay her wedded lord. I bethought

me,

430

Verily, home to my children and servants giving me

welcome

Safe to return; but she has wrought for herself con-

fusion

Plotting these grievous woes, and for other women here-

after,

Even for those, in sooth, whose thoughts are set upon

goodness."

Thus he spake, and I, in turn replying, addressed

him:

435

"Heavens! how from the first has Zeus the thunderer

hated,

All for the women's wiles, the brood of Atreus! What

numbers

Perished in quest of Helen,—and Klytaimnestra, the

meanwhile,

Wrought in her soul this guile for thee afar on thy
journey."

Thus I spake, and he, replying, said to me straight-
way :

440

" See that thou art not, then, like me too mild to thy
helpmeet ;

Nor to her ear reveal each secret matter thou know-
est,

Tell her the part, forsooth, and see that the rest shall
be hidden,

Nathless, not unto thee will come such murder, Odys-
seus,

Dealt by a wife ; for wise indeed, and true in her pur-
pose,

445

Noble Penelope is, the child of Ikarios. Truly,
She it was whom we left, a fair young bride, when
we started

Off for the wars ; and then an infant lay at her bosom,

One who now, methinks, in the list of men must be
seated, —

Blest indeed! ah, yes, for his well-loved father, re-
turning,

450

Him shall behold, and the son shall clasp the sire, as
is fitting.

Not unto me to feast my eyes with the sight of my
offspring

Granted the wife of my bosom, but first of life she
bereft me.

Therefore I say, moreover, and charge thee well to
remember,

Unto thine own dear land steer thou thy vessel in
secret,

455

Not in the light; since faith can be placed in woman
no longer."

II.

AISCHYLOS.

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THE DEATH OF AGAMEMNON.

FROM AISCHYLOS.

I.

[AISCHYLOS, *Agamemnon*, 1266-1318.*]

CHORUS — KASSANDRA — AGAMEMNON.

CHORUS.

O WRETCHED woman indeed, and O most wise,
Much hast thou said ; but if thou knowest well
Thy doom, why, like a heifer, by the Gods
Led to the altar, tread so brave of soul?

KASSANDRA.

There's no escape, O friends, the time is full.

CHORUS.

Nathless, the last to enter gains in time.

* Text of Paley.

KASSANDRA.

The day has come ; little I make by flight.

CHORUS.

Thou art bold indeed, and of a daring spirit !

KASSANDRA.

Such sayings from the happy none hath heard.

CHORUS.

Grandly to die is still a grace to mortals.

KASSANDRA.

Alas, my sire, — thee and thy noble brood !

(She starts back from the entrance.)

CHORUS.

How now ? What horror turns thee back again ?

KASSANDRA.

Faugh! faugh!

CHORUS.

Why such a cry? There's something chills thy soul!

KASSANDRA.

The halls breathe murder, — ay, they drip with blood.

CHORUS.

How? 'Tis the smell of victims at the hearth.

KASSANDRA.

Nay, but the exhalation of the tomb!

CHORUS.

No Syrian dainty, this, of which thou speakest.

KASSANDRA (*at the portal*).

Yet will I in the palace wail my own
And Agamemnon's fate! Enough of life!
Alas, O friends!
Yet not for naught I quail, not as a bird
Snared in the bush: bear witness, though I die,
A woman's slaughter shall requite my own,
And, for this man ill-yoked, a man shall fall!
Thus prays of you a stranger, at death's door.

CHORUS.

Lost one, I rue with thee thy foretold doom!

KASSANDRA.

Once more I fain would utter words, once more, —
'Tis my own threne! And I invoke the Sun,
By his last beam, that my detested foes

May pay no less to them who shall avenge me,
Than I who die an unresisting slave !

* * * * *

(She enters the palace.)

CHORUS.

Of Fortune was never yet enow
To mortal man ; and no one ever
Her presence from his house would sever
And point, and say, "Come no more nigh !"
Unto our King granted the Gods on high
That Priam's towers should bow,
And homeward, crowned of Heaven, hath he come ;
But now if, for the ancestral blood that lay
At his doors, he falls,—and the dead, that cursed his
home,
He, dying, must in full requite,—

What manner of man is one that would not pray
To be born with a good attendant Sprite?

(An outcry within the palace.)

AGAMEMNON.

Woe's me! I am stricken a deadly blow within!

CHORUS.

Hark! Who is't cries "a blow"? Who meets his death?

AGAMEMNON.

Woe's me! again! a second time I am stricken!

CHORUS.

The deed, methinks, from the King's cry, is done.
Quick, let us see what help may be in counsel!

2.

[*Agamemnon*, 1343 - 1377.]

Enter KLYTAIMNESTRA, from the Palace.

KLYTAIMNESTRA.

Now, all this formal outcry having vent,
I shall not blush to speak the opposite.
How should one, plotting evil things for foes,
Encompass seeming friends with such a bane
Of toils? it were a height too great to leap?
Not without full prevision came, though late,
To me this crisis of an ancient feud.
And here, the deed being done, I stand—even where
I smote him! nor deny that thus I did it,
So that he could not flee nor ward off doom.
A seamless net, as round a fish, I cast
About him, yea, a deadly wealth of robe;
Then smote him twice; and with a double cry

He loosed his limbs ; and to him fallen I gave
Yet a third thrust, a grace to Hades, lord
Of the underworld and guardian of the dead.
So, falling, out he gasps his soul, and out
He spurts a sudden jet of blood, that smites
Me with a sable rain of gory dew, —
Me, then no less exulting than the field
In the sky's gift, while bursts the pregnant ear!
Things being thus, old men of Argos, joy,
If joy ye can ; — I glory in the deed !
And if 't were seemly ever yet to pour
Libation to the dead, 't were most so now ;
Most meet that one, who poured for his own home
A cup of ills, returning, thus should drain it !

CHORUS.

Shame on thy tongue ! how bold of mouth thou art
That vauntest such a speech above thy husband !

KLYTAIMNESTRA.

Ye try me as a woman loose of soul;
But I with dauntless heart avow to you
Well knowing — and whether ye choose to praise or blame
I care not — this is Agamemnon; yea,
My husband; yea, a corpse, of this right hand,
This craftsman sure, the handiwork! Thus stands it.

3.

[*Agamemnon*, 1466-1507.]

CHORUS — SEMI-CHORUS — KLYTAIMNESTRA.

CHORUS.

Woe! Woe!

King! O how shall I weep for thy dying?

What shall my fond heart say anew?

Thou in the web of the spider art lying,

Breathing out life by a death she shall rue.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Alas ! alas for this slavish couch ! By a sword
Two-edged, by a hand untrue,
Thou art smitten, even to death, my lord !

KLYTAIMNESTRA.

Thou sayest this deed was mine alone ;
But I bid thee call me not
The wife of Agamemnon's bed ;
'T was the ancient fell Alastor* of Atreus' throne,
The lord of a horrid feast, this crime begot,
Taking the shape that seemed the wife of the dead, —
His sure revenge, I wot,
A victim ripe hath claimed for the young that bled.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Who shall bear witness now, —
Who of this murder, now, thee guiltless hold ?

* The Evil Genius, the Avenger.

How sayest thou? How?

Yet the fell Alastor may have holpen, I trow :

Still is dark Ares driven

Down currents manifold

Of kindred blood, wherever judgment is given,

And he comes to avenge the children slain of old,

And their thick gore cries to Heaven!

CHORUS.

Woe! Woe!

King! O how shall I weep for thy dying?

What shall my fond heart say anew?

Thou in the web of the spider art lying,

Breathing out life by a death she shall rue!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Alas! alas for this slavish couch! By a sword

Two-edged, by a hand untrue,

Thou art smitten, even to death, my lord!

KLYTAIMNESTRA.

Hath he not subtle Atè brought

Himself, to his kingly halls?

'T was on our own dear offspring, — yea,

On Iphigeneia, wept for still, he wrought

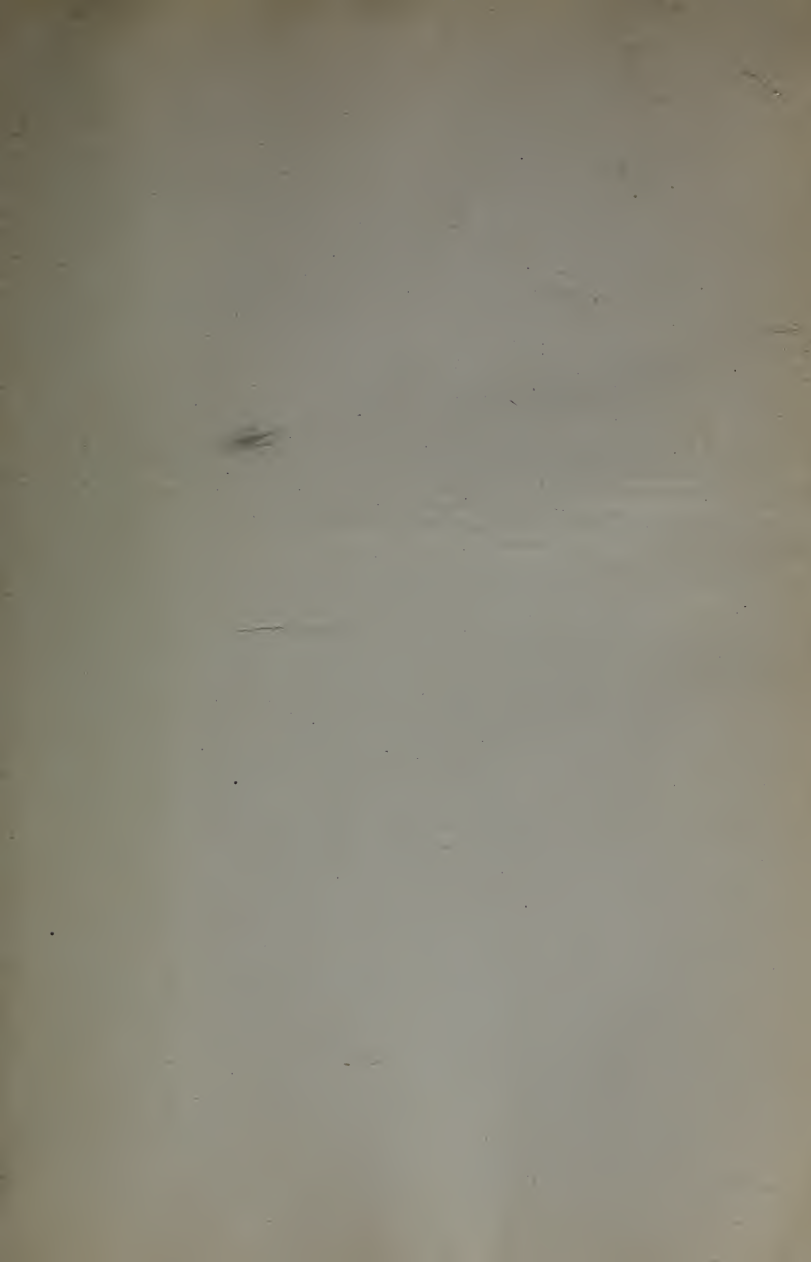
The doom that cried for the doom by which he falls.

O, let him not in Hades boast, I say,

For 't is the sword that calls,

Even for that foul deed, his soul away!

THE END.



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